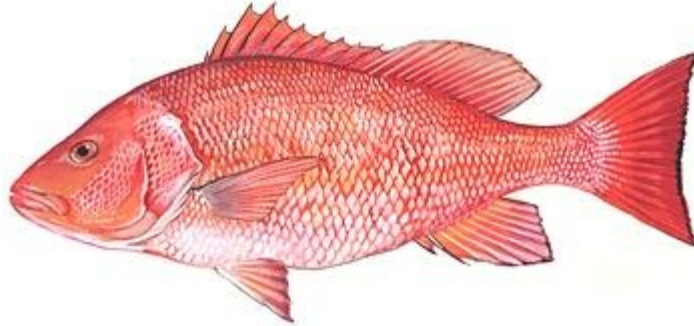


**South Atlantic Red Snapper (Amendment 17A)**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**  
**August 2011**



**GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

**What is the issue with the South Atlantic red snapper population?**

- Stock assessments conducted in 2008 and 2010 indicate the South Atlantic population of red snapper is overfished and is undergoing overfishing.

**How do fishery managers determine whether fish populations are undergoing overfishing and/or overfished?**

- A fish population is considered to be undergoing overfishing if fish are removed from a population at a faster rate than would produce the maximum amount of fish over time.
- A fish population is considered to be overfished if it declines below a predetermined level called the minimum stock size threshold. These levels are defined differently for each fish population based on life history characteristics and other factors.

**What does the law require for fish stocks that are overfished and undergoing overfishing?**

- Laws governing federal fisheries of the United States appear in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), which was last reauthorized in 2007.
- The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires fishery managers to end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks.

**What did the Council and NOAA Fisheries Service do to address this issue in the long-term?**

- The Council included permanent measures to end overfishing of red snapper in Amendment 17A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. Amendment 17A includes:
  - A rebuilding schedule, or a timeframe within which the stock is expected to be rebuilt;
  - A rebuilding strategy;
  - Annual catch limits and accountability measures as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act;

- A total prohibition on harvest and possession of red snapper in federal waters of the South Atlantic. The prohibition on red snapper would also extend into state waters for those vessels associated with federal snapper-grouper permits.
- A requirement for the use of non-stainless steel circle hooks north of 28 degrees latitude; and
- A requirement to monitor the health of the stock and effectiveness of management measures throughout the rebuilding timeframe.
- NOAA Fisheries Service published a final rule implementing these measures on December 9, 2010.
- At their March 2010 meeting, the Council requested a new snapper-grouper amendment (Amendment 22) that would explore alternative management options for red snapper, such as a tagging program. Amendment 22 is currently under development.

#### **When will Amendment 17A go into effect?**

- The prohibition on harvest and possession of red snapper in federal waters and in state waters for vessels holding a federal snapper-grouper permit became effective December 3, 2010.
- The requirement to use non-stainless steel circle hooks north of 28° N. latitude when fishing for snapper-grouper species will be effective March 3, 2011.
- The “snapper-grouper area closure” has been permanently eliminated through Regulatory Amendment 10. **However the prohibition on red snapper is still in effect.**

#### **How long will the prohibition on red snapper fishing last?**

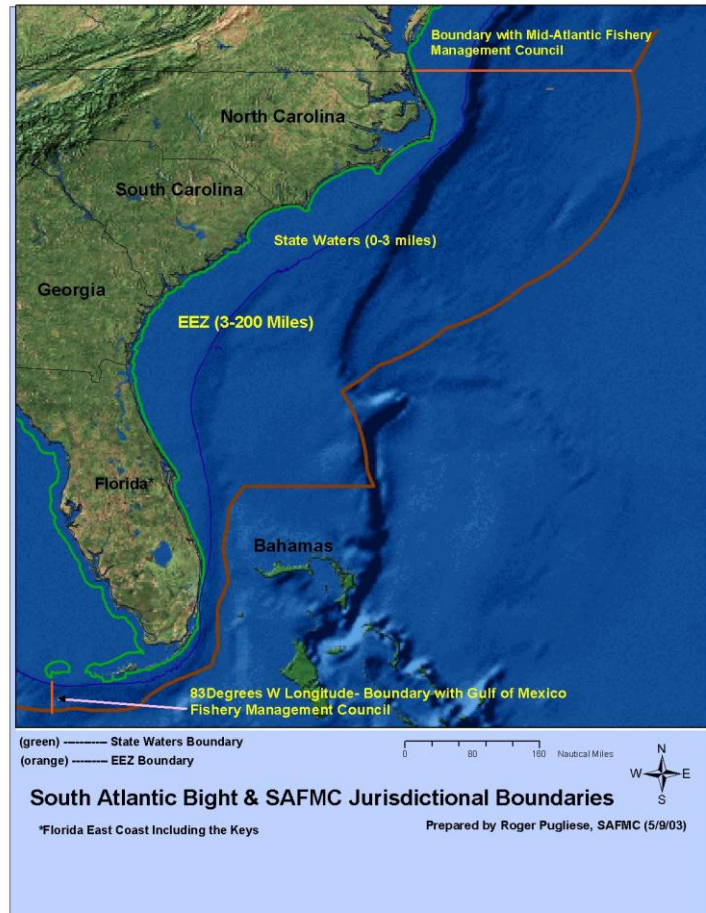
- It is the Council’s intent to re-open the red snapper fishery as soon as the science and the law indicate it is possible.
- Over the course of the rebuilding plan, the number of acceptable removals - meaning total fish killed - should increase each year as the stock recovers. At some point, this number will be large enough to support reopening the red snapper fishery under an alternative management program.

#### **Who is affected by red snapper regulations in Amendment 17A?**

- Regulations for Amendment 17A apply to fishermen holding a South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper-Grouper Permit, a South Atlantic 225 lb Trip Limit Snapper-Grouper Permit, a South Atlantic Charter/Headboat Permit for Snapper-Grouper, and private anglers.

#### **Where is harvest and possession of red snapper prohibited?**

- Harvest and possession of red snapper is prohibited in federal waters of the South Atlantic, and in state water for vessels holding a federal snapper-grouper permit, from the North Carolina/Virginia boarder to the Council’s jurisdictional boundary in the Florida Keys. The east-west boundaries are between 3 and 200 miles east of the shoreline. See map below.



**Fig. 1.** Area outlined in red is closed to harvest and possession of red snapper.

### **RED SNAPPER POPULATION QUESTIONS:**

**Why do scientists say red snapper are overfished when I have been seeing many more red snapper in recent years?**

- A spike in 2007 and 2008 landings indicates that fishermen are seeing more fish now than in previous years. This spike in landings is likely due to a strong year class that occurred in 2006 and 2007.
- Despite these spikes in harvest, the age structure of the population remains truncated (there are not enough older fish). Red snapper live to 54 years of age, but the 2008 and 2010 assessments indicate that most red snapper are less than 10 years of age.
- Although the 2008 and 2010 stock assessments show some signs of improvement, overfishing is still occurring and must be addressed within the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

**We're also seeing more of the larger fish than we have in the past few years. Aren't these larger fish a sign that the population is healthy?**

- For red snapper, larger fish don't always represent older fish. There is a great deal of variability in the age of red snapper at larger sizes. For example, the average size of a 10 year old red snapper is around 32 inches, but 10 year old fish range in size from 27 to 40 inches.
- Age samples from the fishery reveal that most of the fish caught in recent years are younger than age 10.
- Fish are being caught before they become old enough to reach their peak reproductive levels. Although the 20-inch size limit allows some fish to spawn before they become vulnerable to harvest, these younger, mostly first-time spawners are less productive than the older and heavier fish. A 10-year old red snapper may have reached 90–95 percent of its maximum length but only 80 percent of its potential maximum weight.
- Increasing the abundance of older, mature fish is important to long-term sustainability. Increasing the number of mature age classes in the population would allow it to take greater advantage of favorable conditions to produce a large number of recruits (fish that are born within a given year) while also ensuring a buffer to sustain the population during periods of less than optimal conditions for spawning.

#### **Why was a new benchmark stock assessment conducted for red snapper?**

- Fishermen reports reflect a spike in discarded fish during 2007, and landed fish in 2008 and 2009.
- The Southeast, Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) Steering Committee, which creates the benchmark assessment and assessment update schedule, felt the 2007-2009 increase in landings and discards should be incorporated into a new benchmark assessment for the species.
- The new stock assessment was completed in late October 2010.

#### **What were the 2010 stock assessment results?**

- The new stock assessment indicates that red snapper are overfished and undergoing overfishing; however, to a lesser degree than indicated by the previous 2008 stock assessment.
- The new stock assessment indicates the snapper-grouper area closure in Amendment 17A is not necessary to end overfishing of red snapper. **However, the red snapper prohibition is still in effect.**
- The stock assessment (SEDAR 24) and Frequently Asked Questions for SEDAR 24 can be found at the following link: <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>

#### **Where can I get more information on red snapper and Amendment 17A?**

- More information on red snapper and Amendment 17A may be obtained via the Web at: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov> or <http://www.safmc.net>.
- Hardcopies of the most recent version of Amendment 17A and environmental impact statement may be requested from:

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201  
North Charleston, SC 29405

Phone (843) 571-4366  
toll free (866) SAFMC-10  
Fax (843) 769-4520

Or:

NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office  
Office of Sustainable Fisheries c/o Kate Michie  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701-5505

Phone (727) 824-5305  
Fax: (727) 824-5308